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THE DEVELOPING CLIMATE FOR READING RESEARCH--PROGRAMS VS. PROJECTS.

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PROGRAMMATIC RESEARCH IS DISCUSSED AS ONE OF THE BASIC NEEDS OF READING RESEARCH. OTHER NEEDS ARE--(1) FOR BASIC RESEARCH THAT FOCUSES ON THE READING PROCESS, (2) FOR LEADERSHIP THAT VALUES SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIVITY AND INTELLECTUAL HONESTY, AND (3) TO INFORM AND CONVINCE THE PUBLIC OF THE POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF READING RESEARCH. PROGRAMMATIC RESEARCH HAS A FLEXIBLE FORMAT, IS MULTIDISCIPLINARY, AND ALLOWS CREATIVITY, SIMULTANEOUS REPLICATION OF CRUCIAL EXPERIMENTS, AND THE USE OF NEW RESEARCH MANAGEMENT TOOLS. AN INCREASE IN THE USE OF PROGRAMMATIC RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE IS SUGGESTED BY--(1) THE FINDINGS OF THE COORDINATED FIRST GRADE READING STUDY WHICH SUGGEST THE NEED FOR BROADER STUDIES OF BEGINNING READING, (2) CHALL'S "LEARNING TO READ--THE GREAT DEBATE" WHICH ARGUES FOR RESEARCH THAT WILL PRODUCE SOUND THEORIES ON READING, AND (3) PROJECT LITERACY AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY WHICH FOLLOWS THE PROGRAMMATIC FORMAT IN DESIGNING BEGINNING READING TEXTS. THERE IS GROWING INTEREST IN DYSLEXIA AND OTHER RELATED READING DISABILITIES WHICH REQUIRE A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL READING CONFERENCE (TAMPA, NOVEMBER 30 - DECEMBER 2, 1967). (NS)

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The Developing Climate for Reading Research: Programs Vs. Projects

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Harper Lee's novel, To Kill a Mockingbird, offers us a rare opportunity to be children again, to share in all the trials and mysteries of growing up in a world badly run by the Others, the adults. Scout Finch, a little Alabama girl, tells the story with embarrassingly accurate perception of adult foibles and her first day of school gives a particularly good example of the superiority of children's wisdom. Somehow, Scout had learned to read long before she entered school--and

she had learned to love reading. When the teacher discovered this precocious behavior, she was horror-struck. Someone had interfered with the educational process by teaching Scout to read before her sixth birthday. The little girl who should have to struggle with the letters of the alphabet could read aloud the stock-market quotations from The Mobile Register! In order to undo the damage, the teacher forbade Scout to read except in class. In an earnest conference that night, Scout told her father what had happened and swore that she would never go back to school. They agreed to a compromise--they would continue the beloved reading sessions and Scout would return to school and "play dumb." The story goes deeper than this paraphrase, though, because Scout realized that reading was as natural to her as breathing. She could not remember not being able to read and had taken the joy of reading for granted until she was threatened with losing it.

The point of all this is that Scout has set an educational objective, one of the highest ever set: children should learn to read as easily as they learn to walk, or to speak, or to feed themselves. After all, our environment demands more than ever that we read while we are still very young.

Everyone will agree that we cannot count on next year's crop of first-graders to be fluent readers when they arrive at school. If we knew more about reading, however, we might eventually make reading an easy subject instead of one that frustrates teachers and pupils at all levels, kindergarten through post-doctoral. Since we do not know enough about reading to make it an easy subject, we shall have to rely

upon scientific research to increase our knowledge.

Before we can use research to answer questions, though, we must question ourselves. Precisely what do we want to know? Obviously we want knowledge that will help us teach children to read. But this is not precise: do we want knowledge about teaching practices, about reading texts, about the linguistic features of the English language, about children's abilities to learn? Let us try a more fundamental question, one more direct than questions about teaching methodology or curricula: By what process do people read? There must be a process because reading is an orderly, systematic activity. Perhaps different people read by different processes, but surely there are some specific perceptual, neurological, psychological, and cognitive steps that occur in common. If we look closely at people who read well, we should be able to observe and understand each step that contributes to the reading process. And then, once we understand the act of reading we can design teaching practices and materials that respond to established facts about reading.

Now let us examine the factors that will help us answer our research question, "what is the process of reading?" The history of reading research and the present state of our knowledge suggest that we will need a clear focus on reading as a process that is acquired through learning; leadership to provide objectivity, cohesion and continuity; responsible marketing of our services as researchers; and long-term programmatic funding for scientific investigation of reading.

Focus -- The Reading Process

If any one factor has inhibited the progress of reading research, that factor has been the lack of a clear focus that would permit sound theory building. When the medical community focused on polio, they first identified the guilty bacteria and then learned to control it. Meanwhile, reading research attempted to develop a large variety of classroom cures without first doing the basic research that would systematically explain the act of reading.

Past failures and past successes converge to show that a focus on the reading process promises to be a productive one. First, we know such a process exists because people do read; we are not focusing on a phenomenon that may disappear under our scrutiny. Next, the focus is broad enough to accept everyone's contribution, but narrow enough to be manageable. Third, since we are proposing to break new ground, we can all approach this new question without pre-conceptions or biases. Fourth, the talents and resources that are now available can begin the work that we propose and direct it towards sure productivity. Most important, even before we understand the accomplished act of reading, we shall understand important, single steps in the process. Expecting these sorts of interim findings we should be able to improve research planning and teaching strategies as discoveries are made.

Leadership

Along with a lack of focus, a lack of leadership has retarded progress in the field of reading research. A leadership that will

evaluate research findings on their scientific merit alone must emerge. The field has had dozens of authorities who possessed considerable power, but no leaders who could move issues beyond the argument stage of "yes, it is; no it isn't" to obtain answers which have their basis in observable fact. What man, or what organization shall lead? Of course, we do not know--but we can describe the kind of leadership we shall probably need.

Aside from many other obviously desirable qualities, we shall need leadership that prizes intellectual honesty and scientific objectivity. In a field as potentially controversial as ours, these values are the only alternatives to chaos. Further, the leadership must be prepared for a long voyage--provisions must be made for stability and continuity over a period of many years. In this country, we choose our leaders by the democratic process--even when no election is held. Surely, the professional organizations interested in reading will do their utmost to insure that professional issues are arbitrated by the most competent men, not necessarily those with the loudest voices.

Marketing Our Services

It is not enough for reading research to be considered an abstract "good" when we can demonstrate specific contributions to the economy and to the fulfillment of human beings. When support for research is hard to obtain, we are all inclined to gnash our teeth and mutter about an apathetic public. Instead, we should be asking, "who knows enough about our efforts to be convinced of their value?" Questions

about reading have remarkable popular appeal, as witnessed by the attention given them by the newspaper and magazine editors. While reading research might now be called an emotionally appealing issue, it can be made logically appealing by getting some facts before the public. The vital fact that is seldom presented to the public is that our present reading instruction is not based entirely upon empirically established knowledge and that many years and many dollars will be needed for the huge research task that confronts us. A few communities are aware of the necessity of research, but many more communities wait to be convinced. Let us build a national case for reading research that is as compelling as the case built for polio research by the March of Dimes.

Marketing our product is not huckstering if it is done honestly. We wish to contribute to a need that is not accurately perceived by the public; we must face the fact that the task of informing the public is ours and ours alone.

The New Format -- Programmatic Research

For a host of reasons, most research in reading has been conducted in individual projects, each testing one or more hypotheses. These projects have typically involved an investigator and one or two graduate students, or a state reading specialist and several teachers. Budgets have usually provided for little more than staff salaries and modest efforts at dissemination. Most important, the project format has tended to constrain each researcher to a vacuum, remote from cross-fertilization by ideas from disciplines other than his own.

In the future, research in reading will be performed in a programmatic format. A research program is distinctly different from a research project in several ways. A program attempts to solve a problem; it is solution-oriented, and it is staffed and equipped accordingly. In a research program, we would expect to find staff members with experience in many related fields, possibly as many as twenty different disciplines in the case of reading research. The collaboration of the staff members and the more flexible format give programmatic research a dynamic dimension of creativity not usually found in project research: proposals can be developed quickly and competently to meet needs as they arise; crucial experiments can be simultaneously replicated to insure that the findings are valid; an unprofitable line of investigation can be revised before a great amount of time and money are lost; the training of junior staff can be coordinated, accelerated, and deepened by the wealth of talent present among the senior staff. Best of all, new research management tools like the Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) and the Program Planning and Budgeting System (PPBS) can be employed to make sure that flexibility and creativity are built into a program from the start.

There have been a number of recent occurrences that lend some support to the prediction that the amount of programmatic research will soon increase. First, research questions seem to be getting bigger, to demand more staff and more money. For example, the Coordinated First Grade Reading Study conducted by Guy Bond and

Robert Dykstra reports that

> "There are many pupil characteristics related to the success children have in beginning reading...a fair amount of the variation in pupil success can be accounted for by the attributes brought to the learning situation...Future research might well center on teacher and learning situation characteristics rather than method and materials." (1)

These findings forecast a much broader approach to studies of beginning reading: instead of concentrating only on teaching methods, future research will examine the interrelationships present among pupil and teacher characteristics, the learning situation, and the methodology and materials.

Next, Jeanne Chall's new book, Learning to Read: The Great Debate, presents a well-documented and persuasive argument for research that will build a sound theory on the process of reading.(2) The book merits everyone's attention for its scholarship and reasoning, but more important for the guidance it offers the researcher as well as the teacher. Since project research has not built the sort of theory we need, it seems likely that we will now attempt theory-building through programmatic research.

Third, Harry Levin's Project Literacy at Cornell University is nearing completion. This is a research program according to the characteristics we have already outlined, one of the very few ever conducted. Supported by the U.S. Office of Education, this program is attempting to design beginning reading texts that are based entirely upon research findings rather than upon unsubstantiated theory.(3) The texts, the body of basic research, and the program management techniques developed in Project Literacy will provide a rich source of information for future programs to draw upon.

Fourth, we have a growing national interest in dyslexia and related reading disabilities. There have been a dozen articles on dyslexia in leading news magazines over the last year and scores of articles in the newspapers. A research conference held last May at Southwest Texas State College specifically recommended a national study of the problem. (4) It seems likely that a research program, involving many schools and universities, many fields of scientific study, and many converging approaches to the problem may result from the conference's recommendations. This program, should it materialize, could automatically elicit another program that would examine research findings on dyslexia for possible contribution to our knowledge of the reading process in normal readers.

And fifth, planning efforts within the Office of Education are now recognizing the advantages of the programmatic format. In addition to the Research and Development Centers and the National Laboratories, the Office has funded a research program on early childhood education and has invited bids for a research program on teacher education.

Conclusion

The objective we have set is a high one: learning to read should be easy. The investigations that promise to satisfy that objective will focus upon the complex process of reading in an attempt to explain all of the steps that make up the process. By choosing the best available intellectual leadership and by earning the public's enthusiastic support through honest marketing, we shall insure that future research

in reading is generously financed. The scientific study of reading is ready to take a giant step forward and multidisciplinary research programs will be the Seven League Boots that carry us into the future.

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